

100 powerful years for Central Electric

Bus-C
VP: 1225-12
Big anniversary for Watsonville company

By TODD GUILD
OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

WATSONVILLE — Central Electric got its start in Watsonville in 1912, the same year New Mexico and Arizona officially became states, the Girl Scouts were formed and the RMS Titanic hit an iceberg and sank in the North Atlantic.

That's when John and Edith DuFour Stanovich used \$100 to start the business in the Central Hotel on Main Street, selling fixtures, appliances and installing electric wiring.

Using a single bicycle and a 5-foot ladder, the couple would also maintain the light poles along Main Street.

Their business grew as electrical appliances such as irons, washing machines and toasters became an integral part of the American household.

The business continued to expand, and in 1916 moved to the Pajaro Valley Bank building on Main Street.

The company moved to 307 Main St. in 1925, which was its home for 62 years, and to its current location at 430 Walker St. in 1987.

Edith DuFour Stanovich's son Alfred became an electrician in 1918, and joined the business eight years later. He

See CENTRAL, page A6



contributed

Central Electric (at left) is shown in an early-day photo along Main Street looking south.

CENTRAL

From page 1

assumed ownership of the company in 1938.

Soon after that, increased production during World War II led to a copper shortage, which in turn put a damper on the domestic electrical industry.

Not to be dissuaded, Central Electric began selling china and crystal to help keep the business afloat. That part of the business was sold to Fords Department Store in 1968.

Alfred's son Steve DuFour joined the business in 1958, and became partner three years later.

Steve DuFour's wife Joan joined the business soon after that, providing bookkeeping services that many of the family members credit with keeping the place open for so many years.

"She was instrumental in keeping the business going," Steve DuFour said. "She worked literally until the day she passed away, and taught the new girls how to do the accounting."

The "new girls" Steve DuFour spoke of are his daughters Sharon Jurach and Patty Kulich, who have been working for the company for more than two decades.

Patty's husband Tony Kulich joined the company in 1979, and took the leadership role he holds today when he purchased the company in 1999.

"We're proud to have the opportunity to work with our community," Kulich said. "That's huge."

Recently Patty and Tony's sons, 29 and 27, received their electrician's certification and joined the company, making them the fifth generation to work for the company.

The company posted a profit of \$136 in 1927, about \$2,000 in today's dollars. By contrast, it completed its first \$1 million project for Harmony Foods in 1997, and a \$3.5 million project for Monterey Peninsula College in 2009.

Business has ebbed and flowed over the past century as the local processing companies that once provided the bulk of their business has grown leaner and the high-tech industry in

Scotts Valley bloomed.

The company still serves longstanding Watsonville companies such as the S. Martinelli & Co., Sambrailo Packaging, Del Mar Food Products, Driscoll's and other commercial and industrial businesses around the county, Kulich said.

"They have allowed us to stay and prosper during the tough times," he said.

While the company has been a family business since its inception a century ago, Kulich shared credit for its success with his longtime employees, some of whom have been with the company for up to 25 years.

"They're not just employees, they're family," Patty Kulich said. "We work together, we play together, and I don't think a lot of family businesses can say that."

Kulich said the company has gained many of its customers by being the lowest bidder on projects, but added that many of those have returned throughout the years.

"Really it's our long-term customers that are the key," he said. "When you make that shortlist it makes you feel good."



Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

A customer makes a purchase at Central Electric on Walker Street.



contributed

Central Electric in Watsonville has been family owned since 1912. Shown here are Mark Jurach (from left), Soleil Belle (young girl), Matt Kulich, Sarah Kulich, Mike Kulich, Jenny Cowen, Patty Kulich, Tony Kulich, Steve DuFour and Sharon Jurach.